

June 11, 1998

**VA COOPERATION WITH DOD PLUTONIUM BIOASSAY PILOT
PROJECT FOR ATOMIC VETERANS**

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive outlines the policy and procedures of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for cooperating with the plutonium bioassay pilot project for atomic veterans of the Defense Special Weapons Agency (DSWA, formerly the Defense Nuclear Agency) of the Department of Defense (DOD).

2. BACKGROUND

a. The National Defense Authorization Act mandates that for Fiscal Year 1998 the DSWA provide bioassay testing for veterans exposed to ionizing radiation as a result of U.S. atmospheric nuclear weapons tests or the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.

b. The Act further mandates that an appropriate department or agency with access to such veterans collect and transfer the required bioassay samples to the Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) under the appropriate chain of custody.

c. The DSWA has identified VA as the appropriate agency to cooperate with this activity. VA and DSWA have developed an Interagency Agreement to serve as the basis for VA cooperation.

d. VA is serving only as the collecting and transferring agent for this activity. Bioassay testing does not have a medical care purpose and this is not a VA research project.

e. Based on the available DOD funding, it is estimated between 100 to 130 bioassay samples will be collected during Fiscal Year 1998.

3. POLICY: Each VA facility will cooperate with the plutonium bioassay testing pilot project as appropriate.

4. ACTION

a. VA facilities receiving requests from veterans for bioassay testing will refer the veterans to the DSWA, 6801 Telegraph Rd., Alexandria, VA 22310-3398, telephone 800-462-3683.

b. The DSWA will determine if the veteran is eligible for the bioassay test and if funding is available and will respond to the veteran. If testing is authorized, DSWA will provide the following documents directly to the veteran:

- (1) Letter authorizing the testing,
- (2) Bioassay personal data form,
- (3) Fact sheet, and

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(4) Request and consent form.

c. The DSWA will provide the VA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards (VAOPHEH) and BNL information about each veteran for whom testing has been authorized, including name, Social Security Number, address, telephone number, and, if stated, the preferred VA facility for submitting the urine specimen.

d. If necessary, VAOPHEH staff will re-contact the veteran to determine at which VA facility the veteran wishes to submit his urine specimen. After determining which VA facility will be involved, VAOPHEH staff will contact the VA medical center or clinic's Chief of the Laboratory Service (or another appropriate official) to apprise them of the testing and provide additional information as necessary.

e. BNL will ship collection supplies and instructions with return shipment prepaid directly to the veteran.

f. The veteran will bring the collected urine specimen to the selected VA facility with the DSWA authorization letter, instructions, and a signed request and consent form.

g. The veteran and the VA facility staff will complete the chain of custody procedures as appropriate for the specimen. A copy of the signed DOD request and consent form will be retained by VA in the veteran's Consolidated Health Record in accordance with medical records procedures for services provided under VA-DOD sharing. Neither DSWA nor VA will pay for either travel or lodging associated with the plutonium bioassay project.

h. The VA facility will process and forward the specimen to BNL under the chain of custody, as appropriate, in accordance with instructions using the prepaid return shipping container and will notify VAOPHEH by fax that the specimen has been shipped. The VA facility does not have to prepare a bill (see subpar. 4j).

i. BNL will perform the bioassay and notify DSWA of the results. Inquiries from veterans regarding their test results or interpretations will be referred to DSWA (see subpar. 4a for address and telephone number). DSWA will communicate the test results directly to the veterans and inform veterans that they must contact the appropriate VA Regional Office to initiate any actions relating to a compensation claim as a result of the bioassay test. A copy of the test results will be sent by DSWA to VAOPHEH.

j. After all the authorized urine collections have been completed (or the fiscal year is about to end), VAOPHEH will provide a summary to the Office of the VHA Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The CFO will submit a single bill to DOD and receive a single payment. The CFO will reimburse the Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) \$75 per collection performed by their facilities. **NOTE:** *This is the estimated VA local cost for staff time for completion of VA records, shipping, incidental supplies, etc.*

5. REFERENCES: None.

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6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: Chief, Public Health and Environmental Hazards Officer (13) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. For general questions about bioassay project, call DSWA at 800-462-3683; in response to questions about VA cooperation, VAOPHEH call 202-273-8575 or Fax 202-273-9080; and for technical questions about collection call BNL at 516-344-2007.

7. RECISSION: This VHA Directive expires June 11, 2003.

S/ Robyn Nishimi, Ph.D. for
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Under Secretary for Health

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